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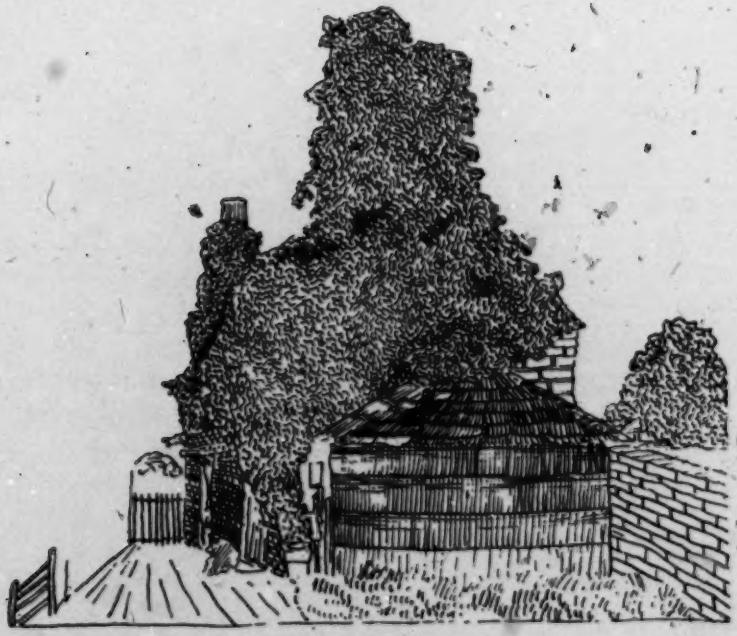
Drawings by

STANLEY SPENCER

THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN 1954



LIZA'S COTTAGE COOKHAM [NO. 2]

COVER: PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST [NO. 25]

FOREWORD

Stanley Spencer's work stands quite apart from any school or trend in contemporary English painting. He has been working now for nearly fifty years and has consistently followed his own path and pursued his own vision. This exhibition of drawings has been largely drawn from the artist's own collection, and over half of the drawings have never before been exhibited. Nor, so far as is known, have the drawings illustrated in the catalogue ever been reproduced. The range of the exhibition covers the whole period of Spencer's working life from juvenilia executed when he was still in his 'teens, to a drawing from a series on which he is working at the present time.

A retrospective exhibition of Spencer's painting will be arranged by the Tate Gallery next autumn, and it is hoped that this exhibition of drawings will be shown concurrently at St. James's Square.

The selection has been made by Mr. David Sylvester who has also written the introduction. We are deeply grateful to the artist himself for his unsparing help and to the owners listed below who have most generously denuded their walls.

P. J.

INTRODUCTION

In most painters' houses you will find hanging, or at least stacked away somewhere, a few favourites among their own canvasses which they have withheld from sale. The only paintings of his own in Stanley Spencer's house are barely or not yet dry. On the other hand, the place is swarming with his drawings. There are stacks of them in every room – from highly elaborate and finished portraits and compositions to the sketchiest notes on scraps of paper – covering nearly fifty years' activity and numbering many thousands. Of this great hoard only a tiny proportion has ever been publicly exhibited or reproduced, for all that the number of first-rate examples of his work which it includes far exceeds that of those drawings which have found their way into the hands of collectors and museums.

Spencer's unwillingness to part with his drawings – either via the

dealer or via the dustbin – suggests the immense personal importance they have for him. This importance is in part sentimental – which is illuminating in view of his lack of any such sentimental attachment to his paintings – and in part practical, inasmuch as the drawings are the raw material of his paintings apart from the landscapes (1). The extent to which he regards his drawings – other than the portraits, and not all of these – as private property is shown, not only by his reluctance to sell them, but by an indifference to their presentability manifested in a practice of meticulously drawing elaborate compositions on the shoddiest paper. Nevertheless, whatever the extent to which his drawings – outside of the portraits – may be private statements, they are statements of great public interest, because the paintings are public statements and the paintings derive their life, as we shall see, from the drawings.

With Spencer, the vital moment of creation occurs when he draws. It is the act of drawing that is the real act of externalising his vision – or perhaps one should say, his visions. Spencer is an artist who, unlike most good artists, has his pictures more or less ready-made in his head before he begins to put them down. Those images he draws in order to clarify them – or, as he says, 'to get rid of doubt'. At the first attempt he draws quickly and with little hesitation. And once he has done so the image is fixed for good. He may do a painting direct from this drawing. Or he may produce a more careful and detailed drawing and, if he makes a painting of the subject, use this as his working drawing. In any case, every subsequent version, drawing or painting, will adhere closely to the initial drawing. The painstaking process of painting a Stanley Spencer, in all its minute detail, is nothing other than the complete realisation of the rapid shorthand in which the image first saw the light. To such an extent is it a matter of routine that Spencer mockingly speaks of it as a form of knitting, likening himself at the easel to an old lady seated cosily by the fire. Like the old lady's knitting, the routine is not one that he finds tedious, but enjoyable in a restful way. And, indeed, the results may be thought to reveal that the laborious business of dressing up, so to speak, the image which in its naked form the pencil brought so rapidly to life, has been a labour of love: the botanical detail, for instance, which in the paintings fills in the gaps left bare in the drawings looks as if it had been painted in with a warmth and feeling that seem absent from the rendering of the very similar botanical detail in Spencer's landscapes, which are perhaps painted in a more purely professional spirit – and which, it must be noted, being

painted not from drawings but from nature, are conceived in a quite different way from his subject-pictures.

Such facts about the relation of Spencer's paintings to his drawings go far towards explaining the curious character of those paintings. These facts are plainly relevant to the utilitarian, lifeless, quality of his paint and to his use of colour as an afterthought (which, nevertheless, does not prevent him from using it more felicitously and expressively than is often acknowledged), though they cannot be said to explain these things, which also obtain in the landscapes. What the facts cited do explain is the genesis of the alarming yet acceptable co-existence in Spencer's subject-pictures of a flowing, dynamic design with a meticulous, static rendering of the objects dancing within it – a paradox whose perpetration is what makes his pictures so mad and whose resolution what makes them so moving. For Spencer, as we have seen, breaks all the rules: he congeals the most spontaneous of drawings into the most deliberate of paintings without any modification to the forms or the composition. Any painter who can use a method so insolent and so absurd must be a very bad painter indeed or a painter of genius.

There is clearly some connexion between the facts that drawing is for Spencer the true act of creation and that Spencer's drawing has evolved stylistically far more than his painting. The path taken by that evolution can be seen in the exhibition, so that there is no need to describe it. On the other hand, it will serve some purpose to give a brief account of the iconography and purpose of Spencer's drawings at different periods, for this will allow the visitor to the exhibition to visualise the few drawings on view within the setting of the many from which they have been selected.

Spencer's first drawings – the earliest shown here was done at about the age of fifteen – were mainly illustrations to stories he had read or possible illustrations to stories he might have written. They also included little views of places in and around Cookham. After he entered the Slade School in 1908,* he began to do portraits, and, of course, figure studies, while, after a time, his compositions became mainly biblical in subject. During his war service abroad, all that Spencer drew were some portraits of soldiers, two landscapes, and a single composition. (When he came to depict in the Burghclere Chapel what he had seen there, he had to rely entirely on memory). Most

*The date of Spencer's entry to the Slade is usually given as either 1909 or 1910. The date supplied here is derived from the School's records. It should also be noted that Spencer was born in 1891, and not as is generally stated, 1892.

of the drawings of the immediate post-war period were compositions with biblical subjects. In 1922 Spencer went back to art school in order to draw again from the nude. Then followed the drawings for the Burghclere Chapel, and during the years he was at work on this, the only other compositions he drew were a series of illustrations for an almanac. He produced a certain number of portraits at this time, but it was around 1930 that he began to become prolific in this field. His compositions of the thirties were more varied in subject-matter than previously. During the War, Spencer was an official war artist recording shipbuilding on the Clyde. There he did many thousands of drawings – of shipyard architecture, of machinery, of groups of figures at work, of single figures at work, of the workers as individuals. Since the war, he has drawn portraits and numerous compositions, culminating in an extraordinary series of sixty large drawings celebrating the Cookham regattas of his childhood and depicting all sorts and conditions of men and women and children listening, as they recline in punts or on the river's banks – not to the band, as they actually did, but to the voice of Christ as He preaches from His place in a punt. This series of drawings may well occupy a place in Spencer's *œuvre* second in importance only to that of the Burghclere paintings.

Because he has only lately begun to use these regatta drawings as models for painting, the artist was unable to allow the inclusion of any of them in the present exhibition, but he has made a tracing of one of them for the occasion. This was but one of many services he has rendered without which it would not have been possible to hold this exhibition. In providing material, advising on its selection and supplying information about it, he has been indefatigably helpful, patient and kind.

DAVID SYLVESTER

CATALOGUE

Except where otherwise stated, all works are lent by the artist. The measurements given are 'sight' size and not the size of the sheet: height precedes width.

The dates ascribed to undated drawings have been based on information supplied by the artist.

1 UNA AND THE LION *c.* 1906
Pen and ink 12½ × 10 ins.

2 LIZA'S COTTAGE, COOKHAM *c.* 1907
REPRODUCED INSIDE COVER
Pen and ink 8¾ × 7 ins. Inscribed *30*
This and the following drawing are pages from the artist's first sketch-book.

3 STRAND MEADOWS, COOKHAM *c.* 1907–08
Pen and ink 8¾ × 7 ins. Inscribed *48*
See note on preceding drawing

4 WOMAN FEEDING A CALF *c.* 1908–09
Pen and ink and sepia wash 11¼ × 16⅜ ins.
Lent by James Wood, Esq.

5 THE NEW SHAWL *c.* 1908–09
Pen and ink 12¼ × 13½ ins.
Lent by James Wood, Esq.

6 PORTRAIT OF DOT WOOSTER *c.* 1909
Pencil 11¼ × 10 ins. Signed *S. Spencer* and inscribed *For Competition* on the mount

7 DAVID *c.* 1909–10 PLATE 1
Pen and ink and pencil, heightened with white 11⅝ × 12½ ins.
An allegorical composition, not an illustration of any particular event in the life of David
Lent by W. A. Evill, Esq.

8 THE LAST DAY *c.* 1909–10
Pen and ink and wash 15¼ × 21⅞ ins.
Lent by W. A. Evill, Esq.

9 PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST *c.* 1912
Black chalk $9\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{7}{8}$ ins.
Lent by James Wood, Esq.

10 PORTRAIT OF SYDNEY SPENCER 1913
Pencil $11\frac{1}{4} \times 8\frac{3}{4}$ ins. Signed *Stanley Spencer* and inscribed *Jan 3 1913*

11 PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST 1913
Pen and ink $8\frac{7}{8} \times 14$ ins. Inscribed *Dec 1913* and *To John Rothenstein from Stanley Spencer*
Lent by Sir John Rothenstein, C.B.E.

12 THE SUPPER AT EMMAUS *c.* 1914–15
Pen and wash and pencil $9\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ ins.
Lent by W. A. Evill, Esq.

13 PORTRAIT OF PHYLLIS GRANT *c.* 1919–20
Pencil $11\frac{7}{8} \times 9\frac{3}{4}$ ins. Signed *Stanley Spencer*
Lent by W. A. Evill, Esq.

14 THE LAST SUPPER *c.* 1919–20 PLATE II
Pencil and sepia wash 21 × 29 ins.
Working drawing for the painting (1920) of *The Last Supper* in the Collection of Lord Justice Slesser
Lent by J. L. Behrend, Esq.

15 CHRIST CARRYING THE CROSS *c.* 1919–20
Pencil and sepia wash $14\frac{1}{4} \times 13\frac{3}{8}$ ins.
Working drawing for the painting (1920) *Christ carrying The Cross* in the Tate Gallery
Lent by Richard Carline, Esq.

16 DECORATIVE COMPOSITION *c.* 1920–21
Pencil and sepia wash $19\frac{3}{4} \times 13\frac{7}{8}$ ins.
Study for a projected wall-painting, celebrating the City of Leeds, for Leeds Town Hall. This was never carried out, but the drawing served as the basis of a small painting formerly in the collection of Sir Michael Sadler.
Lent by J. L. Behrend, Esq.

17 SCHEME FOR THE DECORATION OF A CHAPEL
Pencil $12\frac{3}{4} \times 12\frac{5}{8}$ ins. *c.* 1921–22
The initial project for the Burghclere Chapel

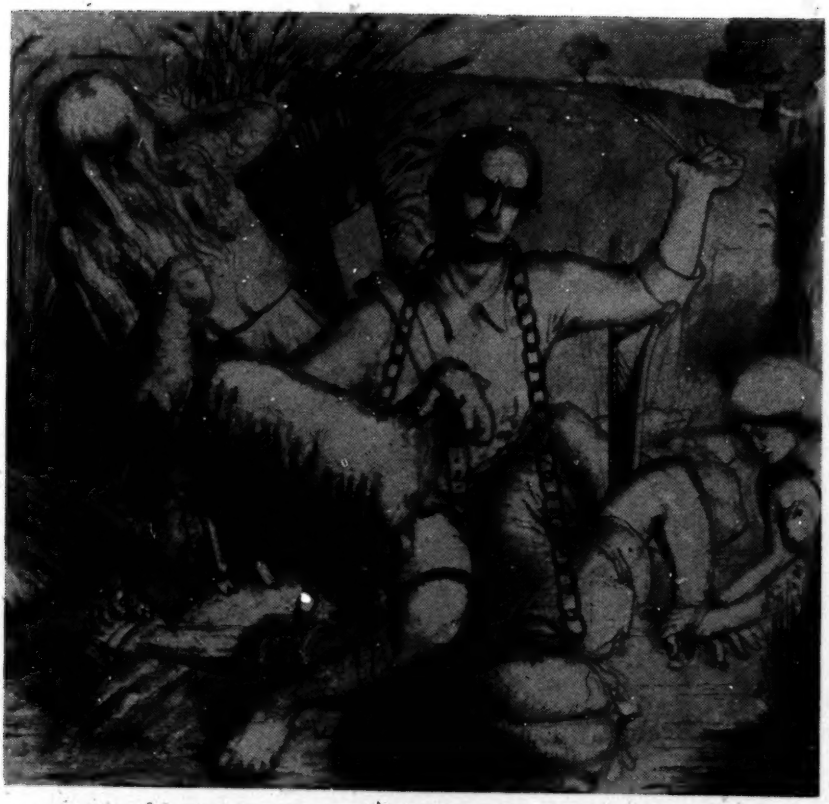


PLATE I DAVID [NO. 7]

18 STUDY OF THE NUDE MALE FIGURE *c.* 1922
Pencil $21\frac{3}{4} \times 14\frac{5}{8}$ ins.
The small study in the right-hand corner is probably by Sir Walter W. Russell

19 STUDY OF THE NUDE FEMALE FIGURE *c.* 1922
Pencil $21\frac{5}{8} \times 14\frac{1}{2}$ ins.

20 THE MONTH OF MAY *c.* 1924–25
Pen and ink and wash $16\frac{7}{8} \times 14$ ins.
This and the following drawing are two of a series of twenty-four illustrations to an almanac published in 1927 by Chatto & Windus. A painting (1936), *Cows at Cookham* in the collection of T. Balston, Esq. was based on this drawing
Lent by W. A. Evill, Esq.

21 THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER *c.* 1924–25
Pen and ink 19⅜ × 14½ ins. Signed *Stanley Spencer*
See note on preceding drawing
Lent by W. A. Evill, Esq.

22 SOLDIERS SHAKING HANDS *c.* 1926
Pencil and wash 7½ × 9¾ ins.
Preliminary study for a detail of the painting (1928) of the *Resurrection* on the altar wall of the Burghclere Chapel. Cf. No. 23

23 SHAKING HANDS *c.* 1926
Pencil and wash 10½ × 20½ ins.
Working drawing for a detail of the painting (1928) of the *Resurrection* on the altar wall of the Burghclere Chapel. Cf. No. 22

24 CROSSES *c.* 1926
Pencil and wash 29½ × 21½ ins.
Working drawing for a detail of the painting (1928) of the *Resurrection* on the altar wall of the Burghclere Chapel

25 PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST *c.* 1926 REPRODUCED ON THE
Pencil 12 × 7⅛ ins. Signed *Stanley Spencer – 1926?* [COVER

26 PORTRAIT OF ELSIE *c.* 1930
Pencil 14 × 9⅞ ins.

27 PORTRAIT OF MISS HERREN 1930
Pencil 13¾ × 9¾ Signed *Stanley Spencer 1930*

28 PORTRAIT OF HILDA WITH HAIR DOWN 1931
Pencil 24⅛ × 17¾ ins. Signed *Stanley Spencer 1931* PLATE III

29 PORTRAIT OF MR. OWEN 1932
Pencil 14 × 9⅞ ins. Signed *Stanley Spencer Jan 1932*.
Lent by J. L. Behrend, Esq.

30 PORTRAIT OF A PEASANT GIRL 1933
Pencil 13⅞ × 9¾ ins. Signed *Stanley Spencer*
Done at Saas Fé, Switzerland
Lent by Major E. Beddington Behrens, M.C.

31 SARAH TUBB *c.* 1933
Pencil 10½ × 8⅝ ins.
Working drawing for a detail of the painting (1934) *Sarah Tubb and The Heavenly Visitors* in the collection of Mrs. Karmel

PLATE II THE LAST SUPPER [NO. 14]

32 FIGURES EMBRACING *c.* 1934–5
Pencil 22 × 29⅞ ins.
Working drawing (one of six) for a detail of the painting (*c.* 1935) *Love Among the Nations* in the collection of W. A. Evill, Esq.

33 PORTRAIT OF WILLIAM PERREN 1935
Pencil 13¾ × 9⅞ ins. Signed *Stanley Spencer 1935* and inscribed *William Perren Zermatt*
Done at Zermatt, Switzerland; the sitter was a guide
Lent by Major E. Beddington Behrens, M.C.

34 PORTRAIT OF A GIRL 1938
Pencil 13⅜ × 8⅞ ins. Inscribed *To John Rothenstein from Stanley Spencer January 25th 1950*
Lent by Sir John Rothenstein, C.B.E.

35 GANGWAY AT KINGSTON SHIPYARD, PORT GLASGOW 1940
Pencil 19½ × 14 ins. Signed *May 1940 Stanley Spencer* and inscribed *Thursday* and *19 Looking down Gangway*

36 BURNERS 1940
Pencil $9\frac{5}{8} \times 13\frac{5}{8}$ ins. Signed *Stanley Spencer* and inscribed *9. Boys cutting shapes* and *Saturday Evening*
Working drawing for the centre panel of the painting (1941) *Shipbuilding on the Clyde – Burners* in the Imperial War Museum

37 CAULKING A DECK 1940
Pencil $14 \times 19\frac{1}{2}$ ins. Signed *May 1940 Stanley Spencer* and inscribed *Mon afternoon* and *34 Caulkers from life*
The right-hand side served as a working drawing for a detail of the painting (1940) *Caulkers* in the collection of Zoltan Lewinter-Frankl, Esq., Belfast

38 STOCKS, KINGSTON SHIPYARD, PORT GLASGOW
Pencil $15\frac{1}{2} \times 26\frac{1}{2}$ ins. *c.* 1940–42

39 A MAN MAKING A TEMPLATE FOR A HAWSE
Pencil $19\frac{1}{2} \times 15\frac{3}{4}$ ins. *c.* 1940–42

40 SAWMILL *c.* 1940–42
Pencil $32 \times 15\frac{3}{4}$ ins.

41 PORTRAIT OF WILFRID EVILL 1942
Pencil $13\frac{3}{4} \times 9\frac{3}{4}$ ins. Signed *Stanley Spencer April 1942*
Lent by W. A. Evill, Esq.

42 TWO WORKERS IN A RIGGERS' LOFT *c.* 1943
Pencil 30×16 ins. Inscribed *5. Central group Paravane*
Working drawing for a detail of the centre panel of the painting (1944) *Shipbuilding on the Clyde – Riggers* in the Imperial War Museum. The artist himself posed in a mirror for both figures

43 RESURRECTING MOTHERS *c.* 1935 and *c.* 1943
Pencil $12\frac{1}{4} \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ ins. Inscribed *14*
Preliminary study for a detail of the painting (1945) *The Resurrection – Tidying* in the Birmingham City Art Gallery. Cf. No. 45. The central figure was drawn about 1935 as a simple draped figure. About 1943, when the artist was working out the scheme for the *Resurrection* series, the other figures were added

44 PEOPLE YAWNING *c.* 1943
Pencil $15\frac{1}{2} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ ins.
Preliminary study for a detail of the left-hand panel of the painting (1945) *The Resurrection – Waking Up* in the collection of Mrs. M. Corble. Cf. No. 46

PLATE III PORTRAIT OF HILDA WITH HAIR DOWN [NO. 28]

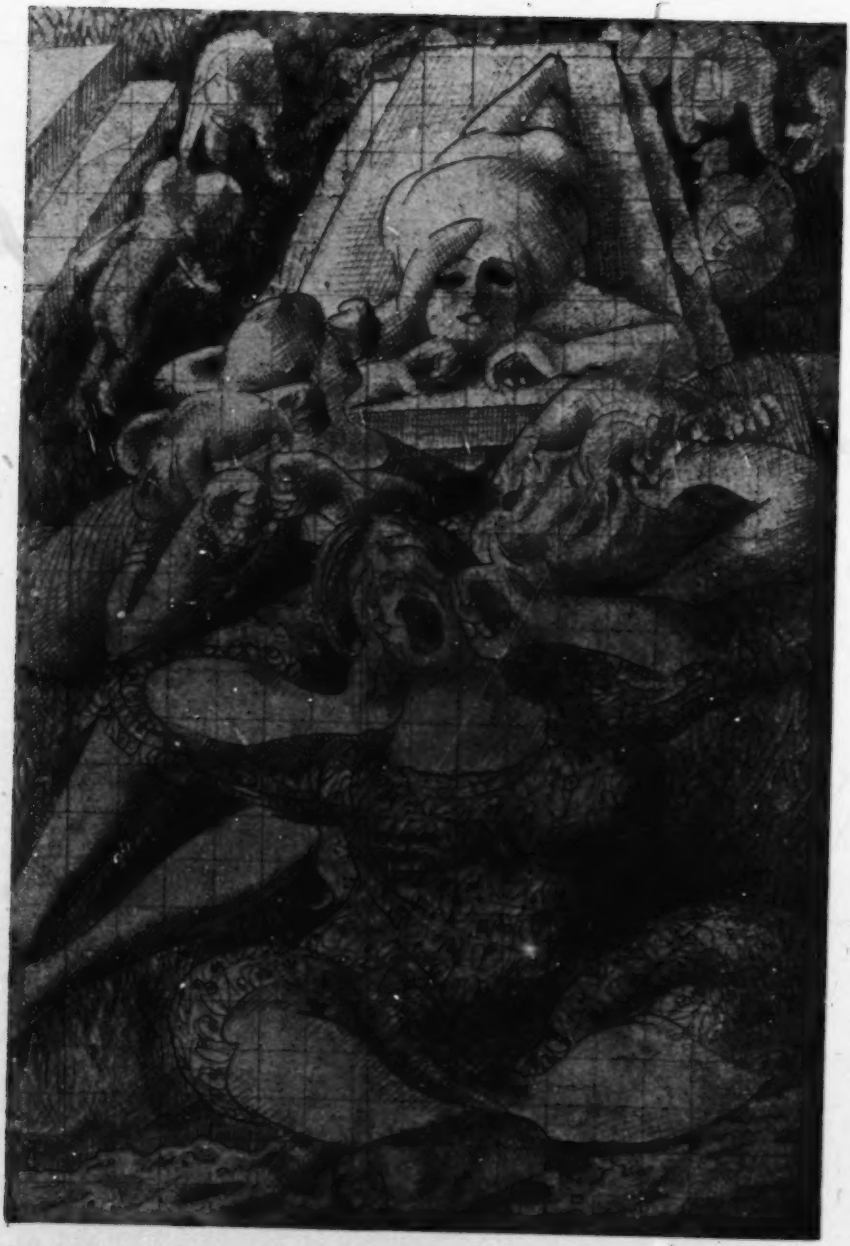


PLATE IV PEOPLE YAWNING [NO. 46]

45 RESURRECTING MOTHERS 1944
Pencil $15\frac{3}{4} \times 10\frac{3}{8}$ ins. Signed *Stanley Spencer Sept-Oct* and inscribed *22* and *43*
Page from a sketch book. Working drawing for a detail of the painting (1945) *The Resurrection – Tidying* in the Birmingham City Art Gallery. Cf. No. 43

46 PEOPLE YAWNING 1944 PLATE IV
Pencil $15\frac{3}{4} \times 10\frac{1}{2}$ ins. Signed *Stanley Spencer Sept-Oct 1944*
Page from a sketch-book. Working drawing for a detail of the left-hand panel of the painting (1945) *The Resurrection – Waking Up* in the collection of Mrs. M. Corble. Cf. No. 44

47 PORTRAIT OF SYLVIA BREWER *c.* 1946
Pencil 16×19 ins. Inscribed *Sylvia Brewer*

48 PORTRAIT OF RAFAELLA 1947
Pencil $19\frac{1}{2} \times 15\frac{1}{2}$ ins.
Lent by the Cecil Higgins Museum, Bedford

49 PORTRAIT OF FRANCIS DAVIES 1947
Pencil $20\frac{5}{8} \times 16\frac{1}{8}$ ins. Cf. No. 50
Lent by Francis Davies, Esq.

50 PORTRAIT OF FRANCIS DAVIES 1947
Pencil $19 \times 14\frac{1}{2}$ ins.
A later drawing than the other, more finished, version of the same subject (No. 49)

51 PORTRAIT OF JOHN ROTHENSTEIN 1950
Pencil $16\frac{7}{8} \times 12\frac{5}{8}$ ins. Inscribed *To John Rothenstein from Stanley Spencer Feb 1st 1950*
Lent by Sir John Rothenstein, C.B.E.

52 GIRLS IN A PUNT, COOKHAM REGATTA 1952
Pencil 19×39 ins. Inscribed *Tracing made by Stanley Spencer from drawing by Stanley Spencer*
A tracing from the original drawing in red chalk, which is one of a series of about sixty drawings (1952–53) of regatta scenes

LIST OF OWNERS

Beddington Behrens, Major E., M.C.	30, 33
Bedford, Cecil Higgins Museum	48
Behrend, J. L., Esq.	14, 16, 29
Carline, Richard, Esq.	15
Davies, Francis, Esq.	49
Evill, W. A., Esq.	7, 8, 12, 13, 20, 21, 41
Rothenstein, Sir John, C.B.E.	11, 34, 51
Spencer, Stanley, Esq. C.B.E., R.A.	1, 2, 3, 6, 10, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 50, 52
Wood, James, Esq.	4, 5, 9

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